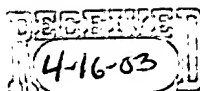


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IN THE CLAIMS:

The following listing of the claims replaces all earlier listings and all earlier versions. Please amend claims 1, 3, 4, 7, 13, 15, 16, 18, and 19 as follows.

- Sub
C1
1. (Currently Amended) An image processing apparatus comprising:
a saturation calculation unit arranged to calculate saturation
information of an image;
a saturation conversion characteristic generating unit arranged to
generate a saturation conversion characteristic on the basis of conversion lines or curves
corresponding to each conversion condition for a low-saturation side and a high-saturation
side, where ~~said~~ the saturation conversion characteristic shows the relationship between
input saturation information and output saturation information; and
a saturation conversion unit arranged to convert the saturation of the
image on the basis of ~~said~~ the saturation conversion characteristic.
- B1
2. (Previously Cancelled)
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3. (Currently Amended) The apparatus according to claim 1, further
comprising a conversion condition setting unit arranged to set ~~said~~ each conversion
condition for the low-saturation side and the high-saturation side by using ~~said~~ the input
saturation information.

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4. (Currently Amended) The apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising an instruction unit arranged to make an instruction input by a user in order to set said each conversion condition for the low-saturation side and the high-saturation side.

5, 6. (Previously Cancelled)

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C1
7. (Currently Amended) The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said the saturation conversion characteristic exhibits a ~~monotonous~~ monotonic increase or a ~~monotonous~~ monotonic decrease.

8-11. (Previously Cancelled)

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12. (Previously Amended) The apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising:
a detection unit arranged to detect a color distribution of the image;
a generation unit arranged to generate gradation correction information of the image on the basis of the color distribution; and
a gradation correction unit arranged to perform gradation correction of the image on the basis of the gradation correction information.

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13. (Currently Amended) The apparatus according to claim 12, wherein said saturation conversion unit performs saturation conversion for on an image which has undergone gradation correction by said gradation correction unit.

14. (Previously Amended) The apparatus according to claim 12, wherein said generation unit comprises:

a highlight calculation unit arranged to calculate highlight area information of an image on the basis of the color distribution; and

a white balance calculation unit arranged to calculate white balance information on the basis of the highlight area information and a predetermined highlight value, and wherein

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said gradation correction unit corrects gradation of the image on the basis of the white balance information and the highlight value.

15. (Currently Amended) The apparatus according to claim 12, wherein said generation unit comprises:

a shadow calculation unit arranged to calculate shadow area information of an image; and

a black balance calculation unit arranged to calculate black balance information on the basis of the shadow area information and a predetermined shadow value, and wherein said gradation correction unit corrects gradation of the image on the basis of the black balance information and the shadow value.

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16. (Currently Amended) An image processing method comprising:
a saturation calculation step, of calculating saturation information of
an image;
a saturation conversion characteristic generating step, of generating a
saturation conversion characteristic on the basis of conversion lines or curves
corresponding to each conversion condition for a low-saturation side and a high-saturation
side, where said the saturation conversion characteristic shows the relationship between
input saturation information and output saturation information; and
a saturation conversion step, of converting the saturation of the
image on the basis of said the saturation conversion characteristic.

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17. (Previously Cancelled)

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18. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 16, further
comprising a conversion condition setting step, of setting said each conversion condition
for the low-saturation side and the high-saturation side by using said the input saturation
information.

19. (Currently Amended) A recording medium comprising program
codes of an image processing method at least comprising:
code for a saturation calculation step, of calculating saturation
information of an image;

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code for a saturation conversion characteristic generating step, of
generating a saturation conversion characteristic on the basis of conversion lines or curves
corresponding to each conversion condition for the low-saturation side and the high-
saturation side, where said saturation conversion characteristic shows the relationship
between input saturation information and output saturation information; and

code for a saturation conversion step, of converting the saturation of
the image on the basis of said the saturation conversion characteristic.